

## Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 368

INFO AMEMBASSY MANILA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 CEBU 0021

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, RP

SUBJECT: INTERIM BATASANG PAMBANSA ELECTION PROSPECTS - REGION VII

1. SUMMARY. 62 CANDIDATES FILED FOR THE 13 SEATS AT STAKE IN THE APRIL 7 INTERIM BATASANG PAMBANSA ELECTION FOR THE CENTRAL VISAYAS' REGION VII, WHICH INCLUDES THE PROVINCES OF CEBU, NEGROS ORIENTAL, BOHOL, AND SIKUIJOR. SLATES IDENTIFIED WITH THE KILUSANG BAGONG LIPUNAN (NEW SOCIETY MOVEMEBT - KBL), THEPUSYON BISAYAS (FORMERLY THE YOUNG TURKS), AND THE PARTIDO DEMOCRATA, TOGETHER WITH APPROXIMATELY 25 INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES, ARE MAKING THE RACE.

2. THE PRO-MARCOS KBL IS FIELDING A STRONG SLATE OF CANDIDATES, BRINGING TOGETHER UNDER ONE "UMBRELLA" THE PRINCIPAL FEUDING PRO-MARCOS FACTIONS ON THE HEAVILY-POPULATED ISLAND OF CEBU, AS WELL AS THREE HITHERTO OUTSPOKEN OPPOSITIONISTS, INCLUDING EMILIO "LITO" OSMENA, GRANDSON OF THE LATE PRESIDENT.

3. THE PUSYON BISAYAS SLATE APPEARS TO OFFER THE ONLY MEANINGFUL COMPETITION TO THE KBL. PLEDGING "CRITICAL CONSTRUCTIVE COOPERATION" TO THE MARCOS REGIME, THE PUSYON BISAYAS GROUP SEEMS DETERMINED TO PERSEVERE IN THE

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RACE, DESPITE THE DISARRAY GENERATED WHEN THEY LOST THEIR STELLAR OPPOSITIONIST MEMBER, OSMENA, TO THE KBL. THE OPPOSITION CHARACTER OF THE PUSYON BISAYAS IS SUSPECT IN SOME CEBU POLITICAL CIRCLES, HOWEVER, WHO NOTE THE ROLE OF COMELEC COMMISSIONER CASIMIRO MADARANG IN ITS FOUNDING AND, ALLEGEDLY, ITS FINANCING. THEIR PUBLISHED PLATFORM, HOWEVER, SUGGESTS A DEGREE OF

DIFFERENCE WITH THE GOVERNMENT ON THE CONTINUATION OF MARTIAL LAW AND THE DURATION OF THE INTERIM BATASANG PAMBANSA.

4. ALTHOUGH SOME PUSYON BISAYAS' CANDIDATES HAVE POCKETS OF LOCALIZED SUPPORT, VIRTUALLY ALL POLITICAL OBSERVERS HERE EXPECT THE KBL TO SWEEP THE APRIL 7 ELECTION. THE KBL ENJOYS THE BENEFITS OF (A) A STRONG SLATE; (B) THE SUPPORT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION; (C) THE ADVANTAGES OF BLOC VOTING, AND (D) THE REGIONAL BASE OF THE ELECTION. WITHOUT BLOC VOTING, AND WITH A LOCAL RATHER THAN REGIONAL ELECTORAL DISTRICT, SEVERAL PUSYON BISAYAS CANDIDATES MIGHT WELL HAVE BEEN ELECTED. EVEN WITH THESE DISADVANTAGES, IT IS NOT COMPLETELY OUT OF THE QUESTION THAT ONE OR TWO PUSYON BISAYAS CANDIDATES COULD BE ELECTED. THIS WOULD REQUIRE, HOWEVER, A DEGREE OF SOPHISTICATION IN TICKET-SPLITTING ON THE PART OF THE RURAL VOTER, WHO IS MORE EASILY MARSHALLED BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS TO DO THEIR BIDDING THAN HIS URBAN COUNTERPART, THAN HAS YET BEEN DEMONSTRATED. AT THIS POINT, THE MOST LIKELY OUTCOME OF THE APRIL 7 ELECTION IN REGION VII IS A KBL SWEEP OF THE 13 IBP SEATS. END SUMMARY.

5. THE KBL SLATE. OF THE 62 CANDIDATES WHO FILED FOR THE 13 INTERIM BATASANG PAMBANSA SEATS ALLOTTED TO CONFIDENTIAL

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REGION VII, THE 13 CANDIDATES OF THE PRO-MARCOS KBL APPEAR TO COMPRISE THE STRONGEST SLATE. THE KBL SLATE REPRESENTS A SKILLFUL MERGING OF THREE ERSTWHILE FEUDING PRO-MARCOS POLITICAL FACTIONS IN CEBU: FORMER CONGRESSMAN RAMON DURANO, CEBU PROVINCE POLITICAL BOSS, IS REPRESENTED BY A SON (RAMON DURANO 111) AND A SON-IN-LAW (EMERITO CALDERON, A FORMER CONGRESSMAN); INCUMBENT GOVERNOR EDUARDO R. GULLAS AND FORMER GOVERNOR RENE ESPINA, PREVIOUSLY AT ODDS WITH DURANO AND EACH OTHER, ARE THEMSELVES CANDIDATES. THE INCUMBENT GOVERNOR OF BOHOL, LINO CHATTO, IS ALSO RUNNING. ROUNDING OUT THE LIST ARE THREE OPPOSITION CANDIDATES LURED TO THE KBL TICKET: EMILION "LITO" OSMENA, FORMER CONGRESSMAN ANTONIO CUENCO, AND FORMER CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION DELEGATE VICTOR DE LA SERNA, WHO CONVINCINGLY ARTICULATED THE "NO"

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POSITION IN PUBLIC DISCUSSION OF THE DECEMBER 17  
REFERENDUM.

6. THE OSMENA DEFECTION. CEBUANOS WERE SHOCKED TO LEARN THAT LITO OSMENA HAD JOINTED THE MARCOS SLATE. OSMENA HAD EARLIER FILED HIS CANDIDACY WITH THE PUSYON BISAYAS GROUP, BUT BEFORE THE FILING DEADLINE, WITHDREW AND FILED WITH THE KBL. SKEPTICS ACCUSED HIM OF POLITICAL "BUTTERFLYING"--FLITTING FROM GROUP TO GROUP SEEKING THE BEST DEAL FOR HIS OWN SELF-INTEREST, AND SUGGESTED THAT LITO HAD SUCCUMED TO THE PRESIDENT IN AN EFFORT TO BE FREED FROM HOUSE ARREST AND THE 24-HOUR GUARD HE HAS SUFFERED SINCE HIS RELEASE FROM PRISON IN LATE 1973 FOLLOWING HIS MARTIAL-LAW-CRACKDOWN ARREST. (OSMENA WAS RELEASED FROM HOUSE ARREST, AND THE GUARD REMOVED, SHORTLY FOLLOWING HIS DECISION TO RUN WITH THE KBL.)

7. IMELDA' ROLE. ACCORDING TO LOCAL OPINION, WHEN THE PUSYON BISAYAS GROUP ATTRACTED OSMENA, CUENCO, AND DE LA SERNA TO THEIR RANS, CEBU'S GOVERNOR GULLAS GREW CONCERNED AND CONVEYED TO MALACANANG THAT THE KBL MIGHT BE "IN TROUBLE" IN THE CENTRAL VISAYAS UNLESS SOMETHING WERE DONE ABOUT THE PUSYON BISAYAS. SHORTLY THEREAFTER, THE ENTIRE PUSYON BISAYAS ALSTE WAS INVITED TO MALACANANG. MARCOS IMMEDIATELY INVITED OSMENA FOR A LENGTHY PRIVATE  
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CONVERSATION, AND THEN CALLED CUENCO AND ULTIMATELY DE LA SERNA INTO HIS OFFICE AS WELL. HE SUCCESSFULLY IMPORTUNED THEM TO RUN ON THE KBL SLATE, REPORTEDLY PROMISING THEM THAT THEY WOULD BE FREE TO SPEAK OUT WHEN THEY DID NOT AGREE WITH HIS POSITION. A FEW DAYS LATER THE PRESS REVEALED THAT THE GHREE HAD SWITCHED THEIR

ALLEGIANCE TO KBL. IMELDA MARCOS, WHO IS A KNOWN SUPPORTER OF GOVERNOR GULLAS, WAS MUCH IN EVIDENCE AT THE MALACANANG MEETING AND IS CREDITED WITH THE IDEA OF PERSUADING OSMENA TO RUN WITH THE KBL.

8. OSMENA'S ATTITUDE. LITO OSMENA INSISTS, PUBLICLY AND IN PRIVATE CONVERSATION WITH VISITING POLCOUNS, THAT HE MADE NO DEALS WITH MARCOS, THAT THERE ARE "NO STRINGS" ATTACHED TO HIS DECISION TO RUN WITH THE KBL, ALTHOUGH HE ACKNOWLEDGES THAT HIS GUARD WAS REMOVED. OSMENA ASSERTS THAT HE WILL MAINTAIN AN INDEPENDENT STANCE, AND THAT MARCOS UNDERSTANDS THIS. OSMENA TOLD A PUBLIC RALLY FEBRUARY 25 THAT IF ELECTED HE WOULD WORK FOR "DRASTIC CHANGES" IN THE GOVERNMENT "BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT THE PEOPLE ARE NOT HAPPY EITHER WITH THE OLD SOCIETY OR WITH THE NEW ORDER." EVEN OBSERVERS MOST CRITICAL OF OSMENA FOR MAKING THE MOVE ATTRIBUTE IT, WHEN PRESSED, TO THE EXTREME DIFFICULTY MOST PERSONS WOULD HAVE IN REFUSING THE PRESIDENT WHEN ASKED, FACE-TO-FACE, TO COOPERATE WITH HIM. LITO, THEY ADMIT, PROBABLY SIMPLY COULD NOT SAY "NO" TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC.

9. THE PUSYON BISAYAS: CONSTRUCTIVE OPPOSITION?  
THE PUSYON BISAYAS SLATE HAD ITS ORIGINS IN THE WIDELY PUBLICIZED LAUNCHING IN LATE DECEMBER IN CEBU OF A "NEW" POLITICAL GROUPING CALLED THE "YOUNG TRUKS". THE GROUP INCLUDED SOME MEMBERS OF THE FACTION OF THE OLD OSMENA  
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POLITICAL CAMP WHICH HAD CENTERED AROUND JOHN "SONNY" OSMENA, WHO IS CURRENTLY IN THE UNITED STATES, AND SOME NEWCOMERS TO POLITICS, INCLUDING THE PRESIDENT OF THE CEBU CHAPTER OF THE INTEGRATED BAR OF THE PHILIPPINES, VALENTIN LEGAZPI. THE YOUNG TURKS' CLAIM TO REPRESENT AN OPPOSITION VIEWPOINT WAS MET SKEPTICALLY, HOWEVER, AS PROMINENT IN THE INITIAL PHOTOS WAS RAMON DURANO III WHOSE FATHER IS CLOSELY IDENTIFIED WITH MARCOS. THE PRESENCE IN THE GROUP OF FATHER JORGE KINTANAR, A FORMER CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION DELEGATE WHO HAD HELPED THE COMELEC ORGANIZE PUBLIC DEBATES ON SEVERAL MARTIAL LAW REFERENDA, AND THE KEY ROLE OF COMELEC COMMISSIONER CASIMIRO MADARANG IN ORGANIZING AND, SOME ALLEGED, FINANCING, THE GROUP ALSO RAISED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE GROUP'S OPPOSITION CREDENTIALS. OBSERVERS SUSPECTED THAT THE GROUP HAD BEEN FORMED TO ATTRACT PRESIDENTIAL ATTENTION AND PLACES ON A PRO-MARCOS SLATE.

10. THE ANNOUNCEMENT THAT LITO OSMENA WOULD BE A YOUNG TURK, NOW PUSYON BISAYAS, CANDIDATE, HOWEVER, LENT SOME CREDIBILITY TO THE GROUP'S STANCE OF "CRITICAL CONSTRUCTIVE

COOPERATION." MARCOS' WOOING OF THE THREE MOST OUTSPOKEN,

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ACTION EA-12

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AND WELL-KNOWN, NAMES ON THE PUSYON BISAYAS SLATE  
SUGGESTS HE ATTRIBUTED MORE THAN NUISANCE VALUE TO  
THE GROUP.

11. FOLLOWING THE DEFECTION OF SOMENA, CUENCO, AND DE  
LA SERNA TO KBL RANKS, THERE WAS SOME LOCAL SPECULATION  
THAT THE PUSYON BISAYAS SLATE WOULD WITHDRAW FROM THE  
RACE. SLATE CHAIRMAN VALENTIN LEGAZPI TOLD CONOFF FEB.  
24. HOWEVER, THAT HE WOULD REMAIN IN THE CAMPAIGN UNTIL  
THE END, "EVEN IF I AM THE ONLY CANDIDATE LEFT ON THE  
SLATE." HE SAID THE PUSYON BISAYAS FACED AN "UPHILL  
STRUGGLE", BUT FELT THERE WAS A CHANCE THAT A FEW PUSYON  
BISAYAS CANDIDATES MIGHT WIN ELECTION. AN ATTRACTIVE,  
ARTICULATE, 50ISH NEWCOMER TO POLITICS, LEGAZPI  
SAID THAT HIS GROUP IS STRONGEST IN THE CITY OF CEBU,  
BUT BELIEVES THAT BLOC VOTING WILL WORK AGAINST HIS  
GROUP IN THE RURAL AREAS. WITHOUT BLOC VOTING,  
LEGAZPI SAID, HE BELIEVES THAT SEVERAL OF HIS CANDIDATES  
WOULD BE ELECTED.

12. PUSYON BISAYAS PROGRAM. ON FEBRUARY 23  
THE PUSYON BISAYAS ISSUED A 16-PINT "PROGRAM OF  
GOVERNMENT" WHICH INCLUDED, IN ADDITION TO CALLS FOR  
GOVERNMENT ATTENTION TO THE NEEDS OF THE REGION, A  
DEMAND THAT THE TERM OF THE INTERIM BATASANG PAMBANSA  
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BE LIMITED TO NOT MORE THAN TWO YEARS "TO ACCELERATE THE NORMALIZATION PROCESS OR HASTEN THE LIFTING OF MARTIAL LAW." THE PROGRAM ALSO ASKS THAT THE CONSTITUTION BE AMENDED TO ALLOW THE SUPREME COURT TO REVIEW THE FACTUAL BASIS OF A DECLARATION OF MARTIAL LAW. THESE PRONOUNCEMENTS, AND THE ATTITUDE CONVEYED BY LEGAZPI IN PRIVATE CONVERSATION, SUGGEST THAT THE PUSYON BISAYAS SLATE, AS CURRENTLY CONSTITUTED, PROBABLY DESERVES TO BE NUMBERED AMONG THE MODERATE OPPOSITION. (IF, AS SOME CHARGE, COMELEC COMMISSIONER MADARANG IS FINANCING THE GROUP, IT IS POSSIBLE IN THE COMPLEXITIES OF CEBU POLITICS THAT MADARANG IS DOING SO ON HIS OWN BEHALF, RATHER THAN FOR THE GOVERNMENT, PER SE. A CEBUANO EXPECTED TO RETIRE SHORTLY FROM THE COMELEC, MADARANG IS BELIEVED TO HAVE AMBITIONS TO BE MAYOR OF CEBU AND MAY BE LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR FUTURE LOCAL ELECTIONS SUPPORT.)

13. PARTIDO DEMOCRATA, ET ALS. A GROUP CALLING ITSELF THE PARTIDO DEMOCRATA, HEADED BY FORMER CEBU CITY FISCAL JOSE AMADORA, HAS FIELDDED A SLATE OF CANDIDATES. POPULAR OPINION CLAIMS THAT VIRTUALLY THE ENTIRE SLATE ARE PERSONS DISMISSED FROM PUBLIC OFFICE, PRINCIPALLY FIS- CALS (ROUGHLY EQUIVALENT TO PROSECUTORS), FOLLOWING THE IMPOSITION OF MARTIAL LAW. THE GROUP IS NOT TAKEN SERIOUSLY AND IS BEING URGED BY THE PUSYON BISAYAS TTPWITHDRAW AND THROW ITS SUPPORT TO THE LEGAZPI SLATE.

14. MOST OF THE 25-ODD INDEPENDENT CANDIDATES ARE RELATIVE UNKNOWNNS. NONE IS GIVEN ANY CHANCE OF VICTORY. MANY WILL PROBABLY WITHDRAW BEFORE ELECTION DAY. SOME, SUCH AS ANTONIO ALVAREZ, ASSISTANT DEAN OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE PHILIPPINE, CEBU COLLEGE, CONFIDENTIAL

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APPEAR SINCERELY DETERMINED TO STAY IN THE RACE UNTIL THE END AND WILL OFFER THE VOTER ADDITIONAL CHOICES.

15. ELECTION PROSPECTS. THE KBL BACKERS, INCLUDING CEBU'S MAYOR EULOGIO BORRES AND CANDIDATE-GOVERNOR EDUARDO GUALLAS, CLEARLY EXPECT A KBL SWEEP. BORRES WAS UNUSUALLY CONFIDENT IN THIS REPSECT IN A FEBRUARY 23 CONVERSATION WITH CON- OFF. THE GOVERNMENT'S SUPERIOR ORGANIZATIONAL BASE, PARTICULARLY IN THE COUNTRYSIDE, BORRES FELT, WOULD CARRY THE DAY.

16. MOST OBSERVERS SHARE BORRES' VIEW. UNITY IS THE CURRENTMHEME IN THE PRO-MARCOS CAMP. ALL FEUDING FACTIONS HAVE REASONS (A RELATIVE, OR THEMSELVES, ON THE

KBL TICKET) TO WORK HARD FOR THE STRONG SLATE. IN ADDITION, THE REGIONAL BASE OF THE ELECTION, COMBINED WITH BLOC VOTING, WILL WORK IN THE GOVERNMENT'S FAVOR. GIVEN CEBU CITY'S 40 PERCENT "NO" VOTE IN THE DECEMBER 17 REFERENDUM, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT IN A COMPLETELY HONEST ELECTION THE CITY WOULD REJECT THE KBL SLATE, EVEN WITH THE VALUED OSMENA NAME ON THE TICKET. BUT THE MORE EASILY CONTROLLED RURAL VOTE IN THE REGION IS EXPECTED TO BE OVERWHELMINGLY PRO-MARCOS, OFFSETTING CEBU CITY'S POSSIBLE OPPOSITIONIST MAJORITY.

17. WITHOUT BLOC VOTING, AND WITH A LOCAL RATHER THAN REGIONAL ELECTORAL DISTRICT, SEVERAL PUSYON BISAYAS CANDIDATES MIGHT WELL HAVE BEEN ELECTED. SOME PUSYON BISAYAS CANDIDATES, SUCH AS FATHER JORGE KINTANAR, AND LEGAZPI HIMSELF, HAVE POCKETS OF LOCALIZED SUPPORT AND MIGHT HAVE STOOD A GOOD CHANCE OF ELECTION IF THE FORMER CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICTS, RATHER THAN THE REGION AS A WHOLE, WERE THE ELECTORAL UNIT. EVEN WITH THESE DISADVANTAGES, IT IS NOT COMPLETELY OUT OF THE QUESTION THAT ONE OR TWO PUSYON BISAYAS CANDIDATES COULD BE ELECTED. (KINTANAR, LEGAZPI, ATTORNEY FILEMON FERNANDEZ, AND HILARIO DAVIDE, JR., ARE FREQUENTLY

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MENTIONED AS HAVING THE BEST ELECTORAL PROSPECTS OF THE PUSYON BISAYAS CANDIDATES.) THIS WOULD REQUIRE, HOWEVER, TICKET-SPLITTING ON THE PART OF THE RURAL VOTER, WHO IS MORE EASILY MARSHALLED BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS TO DO THEIR BIDDING THAN HIS URGAN COUNTERPART, A DEGREE OF SOPHISTICATION UNLIKELY TO BE REALIZED IN THIS CONTEST. AT THIS POINT, THE MOST LIKELY OUTCOME OF THE APRIL 7 ELECTION IN REGION VII IS A KBL SWEEP OF THE 13 IBP SEATS.

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